

Sophomore Summer Reading Expectations for *The Odyssey*

You will be completing the following tasks by Monday, August 20th.

***The Essential Odyssey* translated and edited by Stanley Lombardo. ISBN-10: 0872208990; ISBN-13: 978-0872208995**

The Odyssey, an epic poem of 24 books, chronicles the great Greek warrior and strategist Odysseus's 10-year journey home to Ithaca after the Greeks defeated Troy in the 10-year battle known as the Trojan War (remember he devised the plan of the Trojan Horse). It is a tale of homecoming that spans 10 more years and begins in *media res*, which means it starts in the middle of the action. Books 1-4 deal with Telemachus, Odysseus's son, attempting to find out information about his father and being guided by the goddess Athena. By the time Book 1 begins, Odysseus has been gone for about 19 years. Books 5-12 take us back about 9 years and deal with Odysseus's trials from leaving Troy to arriving on Ithaca, and Books 13-24 deal with the aftermath of his arrival home.

Please read the Introduction to Lombardo's text pages ix-xxiv. We will begin our discussion on August 20th with the Introduction.

As you read the epic, find examples of these themes/Greek values; annotate for them:

1. hospitality (*xenia*)—extremely important to Zeus (feed/bathe guests, then ask questions-no exceptions)
2. moderation—neither too much nor too little of anything
3. heroism—heroic culture; gained by heroic deeds (mainly in war)
4. piety—respect for the gods; “knowing man's place” and not crossing the gods
5. rhetoric/oratory—the ability to persuade others with an argument

Response Questions: After you finish reading the epic, choose *two* of the following questions to answer in a *one-page* response each. Both one-page responses must be typed, in 12pt. Times New Roman font, and include an MLA heading. Ensure each response includes an argumentative topic sentence that responds to the question, blended, introduced, and cited evidence from *The Odyssey*, and insightful commentary. To cite *The Odyssey*, include the page number, book, and line number.

Ex: (24; 4. 485-487)=Page 24, Book 4, Lines 485-487.

1. Discuss the importance of homecoming in the epic. Consider why Homer continually talks about “homecoming”? Why does his hero have to go home? What is Odysseus' alternative, and why doesn't he embrace it?
2. Using evidence from the entire epic, argue whether Odysseus is an effective or ineffective leader.
3. In Book 1, as the gods meet on Mount Olympus, Zeus says:

“Mortals! They are always blaming the gods
For their troubles, when their own witlessness
Causes them more than they were destined for!” (2; 1.37-39).

Is Zeus's claim true for Odysseus and his men? Argue whether Odysseus's fate is determined by himself, by the gods, or by a combination of both?

4. Think about the long-term effects of the Trojan War on individuals, families and kingdoms in *The Odyssey*. How is the war itself spoken of or described by characters in *The Odyssey*? In retrospect, argue whether the war is viewed more as a “shining moment” in Greek history, a terrible memory, or some combination of the two?
5. Discuss the different conceptions of heroism presented in the story. How is Odysseus unique in this larger comparison, and in what way is *The Odyssey* a commentary on heroism?